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ABSTRACT

The history of intergovernmental relations in educational policy has been dominated by regulations, categorical programs, and technical assistance by higher levels of government to stimulate or require lower levels to make changes in policy and practice. This paper summarizes recent research collected by the Consortium of Policy Research in Education (CPRE) on the impact of higher-level government policies at all phases of educational change. Specifically, it highlights the limited influence of intergovernmental policy on classroom practice. General findings are: (1) Use of power and influence in education intergovernmental relations is not a zero-sum game; (2) deregulation per se (including abolishing state codes) does not result in significant policy change; (3) some states use differential regulatory strategies; (4) several states and localities have attempted to use sanctions and incentives to stimulate desired change or performance; (5) many recent curricular reforms are not clearly specified in terms of expected local and school-level implementation; and (6) state education agencies are not well structured or well prepared to help implement and sustain systemic reform. The following sections analyze the evolution of categorical grants and recent political controversies, and review intergovernmental relations in theory and practice, such as the Clinton Administration's federalism and the Republican block-grant approach. A conclusion is that these higher level policy debates may obscure the need for improving the connection between policy and classroom practice. Contains 40 references. (LMI)

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Overview paper on Recent Research on Intergovernmental Relations in Education Policy[1]

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The history of intergovernmental relations in education policy has been dominated by regulations, categorical programs, and technical assistance by higher levels of government to stimulate or require lower levels to make changes in policy and practice (Kirst and Jung, 1986). The impact up and down the governmental chain has been more on policy and legitimation of change, and less on profound changes in classroom practice. Typically, intergovernmental analysis focuses on interactions among adults, while teachers are more involved with children than other adults. Firestone used the metaphor of an ecology of games that are largely separate, but do interact and provide inputs to each intergovernmental unit. For example, there is a state legislative game, state administrative game, district and school administration game, and a teaching game (Firestone, 1989). Each game has separate players, rewards, inputs to other games, and provides outcomes to other games. Programs from higher levels are just one of many influences upon the local school district and classroom game. State programs interact with local demands, local taxes, and needs of local board members, local employees and community groups.

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[1]Paper prepared for the Annual American Education Research Association Meeting, San Francisco, CA, April 1995. The paper is intended to summarize research by the Consortium of Policy Research in Education, 1984-1995. The review, however, also includes research from a variety of sources and viewpoints.

Winning the local game for some players focuses on obtaining state categorical and general aid to create more local programs. But many local administrators are not particularly rewarded in the intergovernmental game, so they tend to tune out signals from the state or federal levels. Teachers see their successes in terms of student learning or just getting through the day. The publicity surrounding the passage of an omnibus state or federal reform package is not central to teachers lives. This research review highlights the limited influence of intergovernmental policy upon classroom practice.

This ecology of games in education policy is an appropriate concept for the succession of attempts by higher levels of government to leverage and change lower levels. It is easier to influence administrators at the state level than teachers through regulatory policies. Less sophisticated policies use mandates that outrun the existing technology and capacity at local classroom levels. Recently, CPRE and others have gathered knowledge about which higher governmental policies have more or less impact in all phases of education change. CPRE has researched this process from the top down and bottom up perspectives.

General Findings from a Decade of CPRE Research

1) Power and influence in education intergovernmental relations is not a zero-sum game (Elmore, Fuhrman, 1990). For example, the inauguration of state curricular frameworks can galvanize more local curriculum policymaking and leadership at the local level. The policymaking impact of all three levels of

graduation standards in the 1980's became a required floor beyond which many LEA's added courses. The dominant concept then, is mutual influence among education policy levels, not zero-sum.

Some state mandates, e.g., requiring a semester of economics, are strongly directive of local behavior. But mandates and rules have not been the main strategy for states to guide or influence local curricular content. California curricular policies in science and social studies, for example, are not mandates and provide a framework rather than prescribe a detailed list of content to be taught. Moreover, many local districts use the state curricular framework as a springboard for their solution to a particular local context. The CPRE study stresses that much state policy is characterized by low enforcement, imprecise policy directives, and local initiatives. Many local districts not only complied with California's 1983 reform law (SB 813), but also were building on the state-based mandates to add new policies of their own (Kirst and Yee in Massell and Fuhrman, 1994). In their study of six states (including California), CPRE researchers found that:

> Local activism in reform has been noted in several studies of the reform movement... This local activism takes a variety of forms: staying ahead of the state and of peers by enacting policies in anticipation of higher state policies to meet specific needs, and using state policies as a catalyst for achieving district objectives. The clearest current manifestation of local activism is the curriculum alignment and standardization movement underway in many districts (Fuhrman and Elmore, 1990).

2) Deregulation per se (including abolishing state codes) does not result in significant policy change (Fuhrman and Elmore, 1994). Additional policies and capacity building are needed to

utilize the flexibility and creativity that deregulation may stimulate. This implies that elimination of state code sections is not a sufficient policy approach to accomplish significant local change.

Research indicates, however, that blanket waivers have more potential impact than rule-by-rule waivers. Blanket waivers broaden the local horizon for change (Fuhrman and Elmore, 1994). Often LEA's are unaware that some desired local changes do not require a state waiver. In South Carolina, for example, one half of the local waiver applications could have been implemented without a state waiver (CPRE, 1992). But automatic sweeping deregulation may stimulate change because it broadens the horizon for planning change, and removes constraints more thoroughly than waivers.

3) Some states use differential regulatory strategies whereby some districts are granted more or less regulation depending on performance indicators and fiscal problems. The consequences of state differential treatment strategies are highly dependent on their designs. The less successful schools may be the most in need of deregulation, but some states restrict waivers to high performing schools (CPRE, 1992 "Ten Lessons About Regulation"). The takeover of low performing local districts by states has little direct impact on schools (Fuhrman and Elmore, 1992). The consequences of state takeover depends on the capacity of the state agency, and whether it can assist or broker meaningful help. School-based change has been difficult for state takeover to

stimulate. State takeover does provide better fiscal control and solvency in LEA's that have been near bankruptcy or using questionable fiscal practices.

4) Several states and localities have attempted to use sanctions and incentives to stimulate desired change or performance. But incentive systems are still in the trial and error stage. It is very difficult to obtain sufficient political support for sanctions upon teachers or schools. such as decreasing teacher pay or removing categorical funds. Using state assessment systems for rewards or sanctions at the school level has raised serious questions about the reliability and validity of state assessments for such purposes (Olsen, 1995). Teacher salary schedules have not changed in decades and continue to include academic credits beyond the B.A. and years of service. In sum, intergovernmental incentive systems are complex to design if policymakers desire to have consistent effects on schools and students (Odden, 1994).

5) Many recent curricular reforms (e.g. NCTM standards) are not clearly specified in terms of expected LEA and school implementation. Standards and frameworks have been in general terms with considerable local latitude (see the standards statements under U.S. Department of Education grants). Evaluations of intergovernmental influences on systems reform, however, suggest particular standards policies can enhance significantly classroom implementation of higher standards for all pupils (Cohen, Spillane, 1994). For example, state curricular policies can change the local

discussion and inject new concepts and thinking into local policies. This is another example of how intergovernmental relations need not be a zero-sum game. State policies can provide knowledge that creeps into local practice over time such as the use of portfolios in Vermont, (Cohen and Spillane, 1994). Curricular reform networks that are started and supported by government, but not part of government have changed classroom practice (Floden, 1995; O'Day, 1995). These reform networks such as the California Science Improvement Network (CSIN) can build teacher capacity, reorient staff development, and seep into the classroom (CPRE, ASCD, 1994). Policymakers get more impact by using "push" factors like assessments and frameworks in conjunction with "pull" factors like incentives and demonstrations. Some package of these policies has more potential than stand-alone policies to help classroom practice.

The context of teachers is very different in reality from how many policymakers view intergovernmental impact upon classroom practice (McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). Consequently, policy needs to be designed from a view inside the classroom looking outward rather than from top/down intergovernmental structures. This classroom context/practice view indicates that capacity building policies such as staff development are crucial if they provide teacher with coaching, follow-up, and professional communities for mutual assistance are crucial (McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993).

6) State Education Agencies (SEA's) are not well structured

or well prepared to help implement and sustain systemic reform (Lusi, 1994). SEA's are organized primarily along categorical or special purpose units that inhibit policy alignment and comprehensive approaches. These segmented organizations need to be recast into shared understandings, roles, tasks that flatten the hierarchy. Comprehensive reform requires policy coherence and treatment of holistic problems. Teamwork and collaboration are crucial which implies changes in SEA reward structure. Since even aligned state policies cannot be expected to have consistent local effects, adjustments will be needed to adapt to diverse contexts.

Most local central offices suffer from the same fragmented structural and operational problems as SEA's (Elmore, 1995). Until the effective schools movement in the 1970's, local central offices paid scant attention to curriculum and instruction. District structures resemble geological accretions over many years, and are not monolithic (Cohen, 1995). State policy is just one of many influences and LEA central subunits react differentially to policies from higher levels. In some LEA's, Title I central units are leading new practice, but in others they are a dominant unit that inhibits attention to new state assessments or curricular framework. Some central offices are strong in science standards leadership, but weak in math or some other subject.

Districts find it difficult to work intensively on all subject matter areas at once. Moreover, districts are beginning to reduce reliance on staff development that is not aligned with subject matter reform concepts. Districts report more interaction with

intra-state and interstate teaching and subject matter networks such as the Urban Math Collaborative (Floden, 1995). Some SEA's have utilized their support of these networks as a way to amplify their impact and compensate for lack of highly qualified SEA employees.

In sum, states and central districts can help improve practice through a variety of strategies and mechanisms. CPRE has focussed upon positive mechanisms such as communicating a common vision, providing instruction guidance (frameworks, assessments, networks), providing resources, and evaluation (Goertz, 1995). These are different intergovernmental policies than the traditional ones of regulation, mandates, categorical grants, block grants, and waivers, and reorganization. Overall, CPRE research indicates that these traditional intergovernmental policies are not sufficient to change classroom practice. For example, block grants that replace several categories are the current hot political topic, but block grants alone are not likely to change much classroom practice. The next section analyzes the evolution of categorical grants and recent political controversies in light of the findings above.

Categorical Grants in Transition

There have been many metaphors to encapsulate intergovernmental relations in education policy such as a "marble cake" or picket fence" with each picket being a separate categorical program. Beginning with vocational education in 1911, NDEA in 1958, and ESEA in 1965, the federal level developed numerous "pickets," or separate categorical programs, that were

wholly or in part administered by states. These pickets or categoricals included administrators at all levels of government, and auditors to ensure that federal/state money was spent according to its particular categorical purpose. The categoricals developed largely in isolation of each other which led to a disease called "hardening of the categories." Most of the categoricals, however, were not directed at the core classroom technology of curriculum and instruction for most students. Special education and Title I, for example, relied significantly on "pull out" programs (Doyle and Cooper, 1988).

Some states in the 1970's followed the federal categorical trend by creating many of their own. SEA's became more regulation oriented as they enforced federal and their own categoricals. The 1983-1990 state reforms, after a Nation at Risk, created more regulation of LEA academic policies in order to raise local standards. But by the end of the 1980's, deregulation became a policy issue in several states, with a growing concern that the 1983-87 era had utilized too many mandates and neglected LEA capacity building.

Categorical policymakers and administrators became adept over time in finding enforcement and influence techniques that helped federal/state grants come closer to their intended local purposes (Kirst and Jung, 1986). Such techniques included federal/state field audits, law suits, socialization of state and local administrators hired with categorical funds, and gradual infusion of categorical purposes within the standard operating procedures of

schools. There was a proliferation of regulations, rules, monitoring and auditing. This trend periodically resulted in agitation for deregulation, waivers and block grants as evidenced in the Reagan education program. A counter trend was state takeover of LEA's when LEA's did not follow the rules. The impact of these various regulation policies has been a major focus of recent CPRE research (see, for example, Fuhrman and Elmore, 1995 and Fuhrman, 1993).

As this categorical enforcement "success" was becoming more evident, concern shifted to the alleged negative cumulative and aggregative impact of the totality of categorical grants. But studies by SRI and others indicated that LEA's had become "accustomed" to handling the numerous federal categories and were not overburdened by regulations (Knapp, 1983). The Reagan Administration attempted to consolidate most federal categoricals, but was rebuffed by the Democratic Congress, and ended up with only minor consolidations (Finn, 1983). Categorical issues and regulation began to recede from the spotlight of intergovernmental concern around 1983 when the state reforms featured higher academic standards for all pupils, and the core curriculum. Later in the 1980's, categorical programs became a concern because they were not well integrated or aligned with high academic standards and systemic reform. Categorical restructuring and deregulation was a major focus of the 1994 ESEA reauthorization, and currently is being discussed by Republican Congressional leaders through block grant legislation.

The Clinton approach has been to link and align more flexible categoricals with national academic standards, while national Republican leaders have emphasized eliminating categoricals through flexible block grants to states. The current pro/con arguments about categorical programs are many sided. Supporters contend that categorical grants protect client groups who need special support, and decategorization has historically been linked with funding cuts (e.g. Chapter Ii of the Elementary/Secondary Education Act of 1982). Opponents stress that categorical grants fragment the approach to cross-cutting problems like education standards, prevent the reallocation of funds from ineffective programs, involve excess overhead costs, and lead to excessive intrusion in local decisions.

Intergovernmental Relations in Theory and Practice

Intergovernmental theories stress metaphors like layer cakes, marble cakes, and functional divisions about what each level should do or not do. CPRE did not find any of these theories adequate (Fuhrman and Elmore, 1990). Perhaps, the marble cake metaphor is the best depiction, but each level tries to maximize its sphere of influence by seizing opportunities. The current block grant controversy will probably create a larger sphere of influence for state and local governments compared to prior federal policy.

It is a long way from a federal block grant to thousands of classrooms. Policies create a skeleton or shell within which classroom practice can change (Cohen and Elmore, 1995). Policies can have significant impacts, but they need to be much more robust

and sophisticated than most traditional approaches that stress either regulation or deregulation. Policymakers must also not lose sight of the realities and context of the classroom teacher (McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). Intergovernmental policies can help establish favorable conditions for teachers who are operating in their own varied contexts. Policy is only one of many influences concerning how teachers respond to students in their classrooms.

Federal, state, local relations in education often are viewed as a zero sum game if one level gains policy influence another level loses. Federal categorical grants and regulations will lead to enhanced federal control at the expense of states and localities. But this simplistic view obscures the subtle relationships that the pervade American federalism in action. As far back as the Johnson education initiatives it was recognized that the total amount of power or influence in the federal system is not constant (Ways, 1964). Consequently, any increase in federal influence need not reduce the influence over policy at the state and local level. President Johnson's creative federalism started from the contrary assumption that total policy and administrative influence/power over education policy - federal, state, and local could be expanded (Fuhrman and Elmore, 1990). New federal initiative like Goals 2,000 and school to work may not diminish the influence of SEA and LEA policymakers. Indeed, the influence of all agencies might increase if policy is made more coherent, systemic, and aligned with high academic content

standards and assessments. The autonomy of the classroom teacher, however, may be eroded somewhat as state and local central office policy makers determine more of what content ought to be taught. Teacher discretion, however, on how state content standards ought to be taught may still be largely unchanged.

Clinton's federalism (embodied in Goals 2,000 and ESEA renewal) attempted major moves away from the prevalent categorical or picket fence federalism towards a new concept of "chain link federalism" (Orland, 1994). The Republican Congress wants to end categorical grants, but the Clinton model for the federal role is akin to a chain link (rather than picket) fence because it assumes that all components of education policy (like all links in the fence chain) must be both strong and connected.

> Certain categories of students may have special educational needs, but it is educationally dysfunctional when the curriculum, performance expectations, and remediation strategies for these students are separated from those of other students. Indeed, there is an inherent interdependence between effectively serving the needs of the disadvantaged and the nature and quality of general educational programs and services. The federal role should therefore foster, rather than inhibit, comprehensive strategies on behalf of disadvantaged students - strategies that are integrated components of a general strategy for educational improvement. Picket fence federalism is an inherently limited approach, protecting the ability of program participants to receive the assistance they are legally entitled to but, in the process, institutionalizing mediocre program services. There was a time when the need for such protection outweighed all other considerations. The fact that this time is likely past and that new, more productive service delivery arrangements can therefore be explored reflects a maturing intergovernmental service partnership that has considerable potential for benefiting disadvantaged children." (Orland, 1994, page 191)

The presumed chain link between categorical programs in

Clinton's federalism is the Goals 2,000 statewide systemic improvement plan. This state plan is intended to provide consistency for local policies and orient federal funds toward more challenging classroom content. A statewide systemic plan, however, requires a state to plan comprehensively before localities are asked to respond. This may necessitate an alignment of state policies so that they all reinforce high student standards and provide consistent signals and guidance to LEA's.

In its initial versions, Goals 2,000 state systemic reform plans were intended to align state assessment, state curricular frameworks, and other policies that reinforced and were consistent with academic standards. It was hoped that the state improvement plan would ensure that there are not major conflicts between state policies (such as low skill level multiple choice tests) and high student standards. For example, state teacher preparation programs need to be geared to the state's student attainment standards. Gaps in state policy could include a lack of state policy for local waivers, or coordinated childrens policies among state agencies. Depth is frequently a problem in staff development because state programs reach only a small fraction of the teachers needed to implement the state's student outcomes. The Goals 2,000 statewide planning body could have a very broad and integrative policy perspective. CPRE's state level research, however, demonstrates that it is very difficult to bring about systemic reform and policy alignment through intergovernment policies (Fuhrman, Massell, et al., 1994 - 10 years of state reform).

Soon after the September 1994 passage of Clinton's legislation, the Congressional elections of November 1994 changed the substance, tone, and politics of intergovernmental relations. National standards will never be certified by NESIC, and the Goals 2,000 state and local grants were cut severely in the Republican 1996 budget package. The federal impetus for systemic reform and categorical restructuring is in doubt. The Clinton Administration stressed that its Goal 2,000 money would have minimal requirements. Michael Cohen, the Clinton Administration spokesperson on Goals 2000, stated:

> "For the first time, the federal government is promoting education reform for all students and all schools rather than focussing on narrow categories and problems . . . [the federal role] will be supporting what state and local education agencies are doing" (School Board News, August 30, 1994, Page 1).

The Republican block grant approach would provide more state flexibility and much less reliance on federal regulations, monitoring, and auditing than in past decades. The ground may be shifting fundamentally concerning intergovernmental relations for the first time since the Great Society era of the mid-1960's. Some minority parents and civil rights advocates remain concerned that state and local politics will not guard their interests and needs as effectively as detailed categorical grants.

These higher level policy debates, however, may obscure the need for improving the connection between policy and classroom practice. David Cohen (1993) summarizes his CPRE research this way:

One thread in our answers to those questions is

> paradoxical. Though policymakers have developed extraordinarily rich ambitions for schools, educational policies and programs have not been richly educative for enactors. The pedagogy of educational policy generally has been didactic, much as teaching often is didactic. Policymakers are practices at telling teachers what to do, but they rarely have done much more than lecture. Like many teachers they focus more on broadcasting their message and covering the material than on figuring out what learners make of it and framing instruction accordingly. Cases in which policymakers or program managers engaged educators in extended instructional conversations that were designed to encourage the desired learning are even more scarce than cases in which teachers engage students in such conversations. Most troubling, policymakers seem to have learned little from experience. The pedagogy of policy remains quite undeveloped even though policymakers' ambitions for classroom pedagogy have developed quite dramatically.

These comments suggest the need to formulate education policy more from inside the schools and classrooms. For example, high performance schools could be studied from the classroom level, and help define external policies by local, state, and federal policymakers that enable and enhance this high school and classroom pupil performance.

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